

Nothing can justify torture.

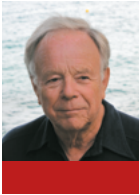
ANNUAL REPORT

2015 World Organisation
Against Torture
(OMCT)



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A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



Yves Berthelot,
President

Torture, a social ill

The number of countries that practice torture has been on the rise for many years now, and in some places, public opinion has come to tolerate the situation, either because it judges torture to be necessary in certain circumstances, or because it accepts it as inevitable. OMCT does not share this opinion. Nothing justifies torture under any circumstances. And torture is not a self-contained, relatively marginal phenomenon, one that requires only the work of specialized institutions and organizations to bring it to an end. No, torture concerns society as a whole. It concerns each and every one of us.

Torture is the manifestation of the ills from which a society suffers: a manifestation of its fears, of the greed of those who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals, of the perversion of power wherever power reigns unfettered.

Torture is a manifestation of the fears awakened by the multiplication of terrorist attacks in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and even the Americas over the course of the past decade. Such acts call for a robust response on the part of the authorities to arrest and try those responsible and to prevent new attacks. But they do not justify torture. Torture is little more than a short-term reaction; it is incapable of responding effectively to feelings of exclusion, be they justified or not, to blind commitments in the name of faith, to dreams of conquest. Any long-term response to terrorism must begin at the level of society, with the pledge to actively build a world where all can live together, in dignity.

Torture is a manifestation of the fears generated by asylum seekers, refugees and migrants across Europe, Australia, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Such fears harden public opinion, they render us insensitive to ill treatment at border crossings, to inhuman and degrading living conditions, to the forced return of persons to their countries of origin even when they risk torture and to the harassment of NGOs working to assist the uprooted.

Torture is a manifestation of the greed of those who take migrants and asylum seekers hostage along the transit routes, often brutally raping or torturing them with the aim of extorting money from their families, a practice far too widespread and to which the authorities in transit countries turn a blind eye. It is a manifestation of the greed

of companies that collude with local Governments to take over lands, without heed for those they chase from their homes and their livelihoods, whose protests are quashed by militias and local police who routinely torture activists, intimidate protesters, and repress union activities, and whose Governments do not intervene to stop this practice.

Torture is a manifestation of the abuse of power by certain heads of State who violate or amend the constitution to maintain power, or throw their political opponents and their supporters in prison. It is a manifestation of the widespread abuses of power by prison authorities, who mistreat children and women in the detention centers for which they are responsible, by officers in police stations where rights are regularly flouted. It is a manifestation of the abuses of power perpetrated, in countries in crisis, by armed groups that prey upon, terrorize and torture their fellow human beings.

In all these cases, in all these circumstances, OMCT denounces abuses, supports local organizations in their fight against torture, and provides assistance to victims. This report bears witness to OMCT's work. Other organizations also work to eradicate torture. But that cannot suffice, especially at a time when Governments are renegeing on their commitment to human rights, or actively intimidating human rights defenders. Citizens must not only support human rights organizations in their fight against torture; we must also, each and everyone of us, each in our own way, work to combat torture and ill treatment, and to make our society more humane.

A WORD FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL



Gerald Staberock,
Secretary General

Taking stock

OMCT: Supporting local change globally

In 2015, as in any given year, OMCT engaged in both local actions with its SOS-Torture Network members and in international policy discussions on torture. As Secretary General, I take an active part in both: in one context I am able to see the facts on the ground for myself,

to hear from defenders and victims' families, to feel the cold nausea of present threats. In the other, I have the opportunity to voice those concerns in a context that often feels abstract and sanitized, so distant from the brutal reality to which it bears witness.

This space — between local action and international debate — is where OMCT does its most important work. It is a thorny, complicated space.

Working locally

There is no single strategy for countering torture; there is no one-size-fits-all model. Successful strategies must be based on local needs, which can differ greatly. Success depends on the strength and resilience of anti-torture actors across the world. Our work is to empower these local actors and to act jointly with them, locally or internationally. This has always been OMCT's philosophy, and this report demonstrates our commitment. All of the activities presented in this report are undertaken jointly with members of our global network. This is our strength.

If policy discussions about torture can often feel abstract, our work on the ground is concrete and real. There is nothing abstract about providing basic legal, medical or social support to individual victims of torture; nothing abstract in working through our Turkish member in Diyarbakir to provide rehabilitation treatment to Syrian refugees; nothing abstract in securing the release of a young man detained for his sexual orientation in Tunisia and subjected to degrading "investigations".

Our work is about protecting the vulnerable and achieving results. We successfully pressed for the closure of two abusive juvenile detention centres (in Uruguay and the Philippines), and secured the first ever indictments for torture in Uruguay. In Mexico — a democracy with an impunity rate of 98 per cent — OMCT and its partners secured a first ever conviction for torture before the UN Committee Against Torture. In Tunisia, where I visited our two victim centers last June, I saw what a concrete difference OMCT can make in the lives of individuals, and the importance of recognition by an international organization such as OMCT.

Upholding international standards and mechanisms

Mechanisms such as the United Nations Committee Against Torture cannot, alone, eradicate torture, but they matter greatly to our partners. As coordinator of civil society engagement with the Committee Against Torture, we supported more than 100 organizations from around the globe to submit alternative reports on their country's human rights record and attend Committee sessions in Geneva.

The effect is that their voices are heard, that the violations happening in their country are not swept under the carpet, and that their recommendations for change are getting the seal of approval at the UN. Resolutions taken at the UN allow us to then work locally with partners to open prison gates, stop abuse, change laws and policies from Pakistan to Togo, from the Philippines to Ivory Coast to Venezuela.

Civil society participation at the Committee depends on the existence, at the national level, of active civil society organizations. For years, the protection of the many human rights workers around the world under constant threat of harassment or torture has been a core mission of OMCT. Now 2015 has seen a very significant development in this area: in recognition of its expertise in defending defenders, OMCT has been selected as one of the four main organizations to set up 'Protect Defenders' the new European Union Human Rights Defenders Protection Mechanism. This report also marks OMCT's 30th anniversary. The greatest achievement, we feel, has been the growth of organizations across the world fighting for human dignity. At a time when an increasing number of laws are being enacted to block anti-torture organizations, our support work is more important every day. What we achieve can only be done with our network of trusted partnerships.

My gratitude and admiration goes to them.

I am privileged to rely on a small group of extraordinarily skilled and committed staff in our Geneva, Tunis and Brussels offices and the support of many interns and volunteers over the year. It is they who make the real difference every day and each of them gives me pride in OMCT. Finally, we are deeply indebted to all those who help us to end torture. I would like to specially thank Eliane Babel-Guerin, Dominique Brustlein-Bobst and Christine Sayegh and the group of friends of Lausanne, as well as to Peter Zangl, for their voluntary support. These contributions are tremendously important to us. My gratitude also to Joan Holmes and Shakeel Mozaffar for their advice, encouragement and inspiration. And of course we extend thanks to our donors and partners. Your engagement, support, constructive criticism and friendship are far from abstract. They are personal, direct and have a real impact on us and on many people's lives. I thank you for this support.

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

A safety net for more than **250** victims

Through its global assistance programme and its work in two victim centres in Tunisia, OMCT provided vital and direct legal, medical and social assistance to more than 250 victims of torture and their families when no other support was available.

More than **200** non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

from 90 countries around the world make up OMCT's SOS-Torture Network. Each keeps its own name and independence; together they provide OMCT with fresh and trustworthy reports about human-rights violations we would otherwise not hear about. OMCT, in turn, helps them by boosting their advocacy capacity both at home and before the international community.

30 years young

OMCT will invite the members of its SOS Torture network to celebrate its 30-year anniversary around the development of a common agenda and toolkit to better fight torture. The celebration will be held during our General Assembly, in November 2016. This milestone, which will help focus our efforts, leverage our resources and measure our progress, will be the fruit of our everyday work on the ground for the past three decades.

159 States and still lots to do

Of the 193 Member States of the United Nations, 159 have ratified the [Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) since its adoption in December 1984. We now face two challenges: to convince the 34 remaining States to ratify the Convention, and to ensure that those who already have actually make use of the Convention. The latter is the bigger challenge.

NGOs from **18** countries submit reports to the CAT

Each year, the United Nations Committee Against Torture (CAT) reviews what Member States have done to combat torture and ill treatment. It draws on any publicly available information including government reports and so-called "alternative reports" thoroughly researched and compiled by local and international NGOs.

The latter are essential tools to ensure that Committee experts get access to information that most States want to hide. Thanks to OMCT's decisive work to promote, support and coordinate civil-society involvement at the CAT, in 2015, NGOs submitted alternative reports for 18 out of the 19 countries reviewed.

More than **400** human rights defenders protected

OMCT provided protective advocacy for more than 400 human rights defenders and their organizations, ensured the relocation of defenders to safety, advocated for an end to impunity and pressed for legal environments more favourable to human rights defenders and their invaluable contributions to society.

Over **20** monitoring visits to children in detention

Torture happens in secret. Civil society's access to places of juvenile detention centers is a key factor in the protection of children deprived of their liberty. In 2015, OMCT jointly with its partners conducted over 20 monitoring visits and engaged national authorities to improve detention conditions. It achieved the closure of two detention facilities and the indictment of officials responsible for the torture of children.

CHILDREN

THE SITUATION

More than 1.1 million children are incarcerated globally (UNICEF estimate, 2009), many for petty crimes. The long-term consequences of torture are much more severe on them than on adults and interrupt their development. Worse, torture of children is often not recognized as such but is instead passed off as a “means of education”.



WHAT WE DO

This holistic programme aims to protect children deprived of their liberty from all forms of violence.

Monitoring:

We work in selected countries with local child-rights and anti-torture organizations to conduct regular visits to juvenile detention centres, which are usually closed to the public. This is an important way to prevent human-rights violations from taking place and to improve the living conditions of children in detention.

Reporting and litigating:

We document, investigate, and report violations against children and seek remedies in court.

Informing and advocating:

We provide training to key actors in the juvenile justice system, launch and participate in global child-rights campaigns advocating better protection of children from violence, and provide direct legal assistance to help children seeking redress for the torture and ill-treatment they suffered. OMCT was perhaps the first anti-torture organization to address children's special vulnerability to torture through global advocacy. Since the launch of its new project initiated in 2009, the programme has built a series of specific, in-country projects in Benin and Uruguay, and expanded in 2015 to Brazil and the Philippines. We have already received several more requests for additional country projects from our partners.

OUR 2015 IMPACTS

Benin: **A new law protecting children**

The new Children's Code (Law 2015-08) enshrines international standards, including on torture, for the protection of children in Benin. The adoption of this law is the product of a sustained civil-society campaign that gained momentum thanks to the involvement of OMCT and its local partner [Enfants Solidaires d'Afrique et du Monde \(ESAM\)](#). The Code came into effect in 2015. OMCT and ESAM will now continue and increase advocacy to make sure the law is enforced.

Brazil: **New bill forbids abusive body searches for prison visits in the state of Rio de Janeiro**

In 2015, OMCT and [Justiça Global](#), our local partner in Brazil, undertook a joint fact-finding mission as part of a long-term partnership to improve the conditions of people deprived of liberty and eradicate torture and ill treatment.

The mission raised as a key concern the humiliating and arbitrary nature of the searches that family members of prisoners must undergo, noting that these searches create obstacles to visits and particularly affect children deprived of liberty, violating their right to family life.

Just a week after we held meetings with the President of the Rio State Parliament and other key policymakers to discuss several issues including the notoriously abusive body searches of visitors of the criminal justice prisons, the State of Rio de Janeiro adopted a draft bill reforming this contentious policy.



Philippines: **Closure of the inhumane Navotas detention centre**

The Navotas Holding Centre in Manila, the Philippines, was for years a detention centre for children. The detention conditions there were appalling, with children being held 24 hours a day in insalubrious cells without ventilation and without beds. Thanks to sustained joint advocacy with our local partner the [Children's Legal Rights and Development Centre \(CLRDC\)](#), **Navotas was closed in January 2015. The children were either released or transferred to another centre with better conditions of detention.**

Uruguay: **Historic prosecution of 26 officials for torturing teenagers**

On 22 August 2015, **for the first time in Uruguay's history, a criminal judge indicted 26 prison guards, civil servants of the Criminal Liability System for Teenagers (SIRPA) on charges of torture**, and for violently restraining unarmed children in the Ceprili juvenile detention centre in Montevideo. The indictment followed a high-level OMCT mission to the country that raised the issues of abuses and impunity in juvenile detention. The mission, together with the leak of several [videos](#) showing children being beaten while handcuffed or forced out of their cells with fire extinguishers, triggered a nationwide debate over the treatment of children in detention. One video shows the president of the Uruguayan union SUINAU observing his colleagues act without trying to stop them (*see press release [here](#)*).

OMCT and its local partner Instituto de Estudios Legales y Sociales de Uruguay (IELSUR) have, for years, been denouncing the torture and ill treatment regularly reported by minors as "usual practice" in Uruguay's prisons. We are closely monitoring the case and providing legal assistance to ensure these crimes are punished (*see the press release [here](#)*).

THE HUMAN STORY

Teo, The Philippines

Advocating better prison conditions

Imprisoned and tortured in Navotas, the Philippines
Teo had grown up mostly alone. His mother worked as a domestic worker in a neighbouring country, and his father left him to the care of his grandparents. When he was 15, he was arrested, indicted for attempted armed robbery and sent to the Navotas detention centre for two years.

He shared his cell with 11 other children. The only source of light was a 50x50-cm window. The centre's bathrooms had no soap, no toothbrushes, and sewage from the toilet would frequently overflow into the showers.

While there, Teo was repeatedly tortured. Violence between prisoners was commonplace, and guards encouraged it. Worse, adult prisoners were sometimes brought into the children's detention centre to "teach them a lesson".

In early 2015, after an international mission of OMCT and regular visits from its local partner, **Navotas was finally closed. Teo was released.** He is now following a rehabilitation programme.



The window in Teo's cell
© Carolina Barbara

OUR 2015 OUTPUTS

Checking on what happens behind closed doors:

Support and coordination of 55 prison monitoring visits: 20 visits of detention centres in Benin, 4 in Uruguay, 2 in Brazil, 29 in the Philippines.

Supporting and assisting child victims and their families:

10 meetings with families of children in conflict with the law to monitor individual cases in Uruguay and define the type of legal or other assistance needed.

Leveraging international mechanisms to protect children:

- **Convention Against Torture:** mission to Uruguay to follow up on the Committee Against Torture's recommendations of May 2014 (the date of Uruguay's last country review) and assess if they had been implemented to better combat torture. The mission included prison visits and meetings with different governmental agencies and key local actors among which NGOs and partner organizations such as UNICEF. The findings will be compiled in a follow-up report submitted to the CAT. The mission was carried out with the support of OMCT's local partners, the [Committee on the Rights of the Child in Uruguay \(CDNU\)](#), the [Instituto de Estudios Legales y Sociales de Uruguay \(IELSUR\)](#) and the Fundación Servicio Paz y Justicia (SERPAJ).
- **Optional protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture (SPT) recommendations:** Confidential report on the local difficulties to implementing their recommendations in Brazil. The OPCAT and SPT are treaty-body tools in the UN human rights system that aim to have an innovative, sustained and proactive approach to the prevention of torture and ill treatment. Confidential Report on the situation of children deprived of liberty in preparation for the SPT visit to Benin.
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child:** Joint Alternative Report of NGOs from Benin to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ([see report](#)), containing specific recommendations for juvenile justice reforms; we presented the report to the CRC ahead of the session with a delegation that included a 15-year-old Beninese child.

Providing training and support to improve national laws:

Supported the design of a child protection policy for Caloocan City, in the Philippines.

Advocating at the decision-makers' level:

- **Benin:** Demanding better detention conditions
 - > Joint advocacy to the Ministry of Justice and to the Ministry of Family for the separation of minors from adults in the new prison of Abomey-Calavi, Benin.
- **Uruguay:** Denouncing torture of teenagers in detention centres for children
 - > Meeting with Uruguayan authorities, including the Supreme Court of Justice and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, together with a United Nations human-rights expert to demand the prioritization of juvenile justice reforms for the prevention of torture (see above).
 - > Spreading the recommendations of the Child Rights Committee's review of the State ([see press release and here](#)).
- **Brazil:** Opposing lowering the age of criminal responsibility and denouncing torture.
 - > Calling on the Human Rights Council to keep the age of criminal responsibility in Brazil at 18 years (see the statement [here](#)).
 - > Calling on the Government of Brazil to refrain from adopting the draft constitutional reform bill proposing to lower the age of criminal majority from 18 to 16 years of age ([see here](#)).
 - > Drawing media attention on widespread ill treatment in the juvenile justice system ([see press release here](#)).
- **Global:** Arguing the case for protecting children first
 - > Participation in the first "World Congress on Juvenile Justice", Geneva, January 2015 ([see press release here](#)).
 - > Advocacy on the UN's responsibility for Sexual violence ([see the press release here](#)).

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

THE SITUATION

Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) are those around the world who put their lives on the line to stand up for our political, civic, economic, social or cultural rights. They are the triggers of change. They speak out and go to the frontline on behalf of those who do not dare, who are too few, or who cannot speak for themselves. In doing this, they too often end up becoming, along with their colleagues and families, the preferred targets of authorities and private groups who make use of enforced disappearances, summary executions, arbitrary detention, torture or even murders to keep them quiet.



On the road between Dushanbe and Khujand
© Peter Zangl

Defenders are most at risk.

Human rights defenders and their organizations across the world have again seen their space for action considerably reduced in 2015 by multifaceted state repression – whether it be through laws and regulations restricting foreign funding, increased administrative burdens, delayed legal proceedings, blatant physical threats or attacks, or even murder.

Because their work often runs counter to the political, cultural, or economic interests of others, a number of land and environmental rights defenders have been the target of violent attacks and reprisals, including murders in 2015. This was the case in Thailand, Colombia, Burma, Brazil, Guatemala, and Honduras, among others. In Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Ecuador, Russia, Mexico, and the Philippines, authorities have tried to curtail the reach of HRDs through judicial harassment, reprisals and intimidation.

In December 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted a [resolution](#) on the protection of HRDs. At a time when HRDs have come under increasing pressure amidst a growing crackdown on civil society in many parts of the world, this Resolution was more important than ever. The fact that – for the first time – the resolution was not adopted by consensus reinforces OMCT’s concerns about the shrinking space for civil society organizations and HRDs across the globe. This calls for even greater and more focused support of HRDs today.

Figures at a glance:

224

HRDs arbitrarily
detained

26

HRDs murdered

66

HRDs released
from detention

47

Interventions
for HRDs speaking
out on land and
environmental rights

24

Interventions
on legislation aimed
at obstructing the
work of HRDs

WHAT WE DO

OMCT endeavours to make sure their voices are heard. We act to protect them. And we maintain communication and assistance to reduce their isolation and vulnerability to reprisals.

Working in partnerships

The Observatory

In 1997, OMCT put its long-term experience in the protection of human rights defenders into the service of an innovative partnership with a peer, Paris-based NGO, the Worldwide Movement for Human Rights, [FIDH](#), to establish the Observatory for the [Protection of Human Rights Defenders](#). Working with its own global network of local partners, OMCT through the Observatory gleans information about cases of harassment and repression of human rights defenders, and sounds the alarm within the international community. Its regular [urgent appeals, press releases or letters to authorities](#) are based on information verified by several reliable sources, and its country reports compile evidence gathered during thorough, dedicated fact-finding and advocacy missions.



ProtectDefenders.eu

In October 2015, OMCT's long-standing work was recognized as one of the four lead organizations of among a coalition of 12 NGOs managing [ProtectDefenders.eu](#) the European Union's new Human Rights Defenders mechanism, providing 24/7 urgent support for human rights defenders and providing a comprehensive safety net for HRD and their organizations facing imminent danger or threats, in remote and difficult to access locations worldwide.



OUR 2015 IMPACTS

In 2015, the Observatory issued 399 urgent interventions concerning 586 human rights defenders and 91 organisations in 61 countries. These interventions have enabled the release of certain defenders and the improvement of the situation of many who were victims of harassment.

Last year, amid a severe political crisis that has, according to media reports, left 400 protesters dead and over 200,000 Burundians fleeing their country, we supported the immediate relocation to a neighbouring country of a human rights defender from Burundi.

Protests were violently crushed while the rights to freedoms of association, of assembly and of expression were heavily undermined before, during, and after the elections in July 2015. The Burundian authorities have since silenced independent media, and hundreds of human rights defenders have fled the country for fear of reprisals. Many of those who remain in Burundi continue to be subject to intimidation, harassment and physical attacks.

In Pakistan, over the past two years, the situation has also become dire for human rights defenders, including high profile killings: in 2015 Orangi Pilot Project (OPP) Director Perween Rahman, who was defending land rights of the poor, and HRCP Coordinator Rashid Rehman, who publicly defended a person accused of blasphemy, were both killed. No investigation has yet led to any arrests for these murders. In that context, OMCT has helped better protect the premises and staff of an NGO defending religious rights of minorities.

We have also called on the UN to look into the Pakistani Government's repression of the right to freedom of expression and to assembly.

In their own words :

"Thanks to the generous support from OMCT, our organization could carry on with its activities of fighting against religious discriminations and defending religious freedom. The support has also made our members feel safer, increasing their confidence and performance at work." Sajid Christopher, President, [Human Friends Organization \(HFO\)](#), Pakistan

THE HUMAN STORY

Saúl and Antonio, Guatemala

Lobbying for their release until they are set free

Defending human rights last year was still very risky business everywhere, including in Guatemala. According to data of our local partner UDEFEGUA, though the number of cases of violent attacks against human rights defenders has dropped to 493 in 2015 from 810 in 2014, their severity has increased: 13 murders, eight attempted murder, 92 cases of torture or ill treatment and 159 cases of judicial harassment. Land rights defenders in the country were still the most affected group among defenders, having suffered a total of 287 attacks in 2015.

Land rights defenders face a critical situation, aggravated by structural issues resulting in conflicts throughout the country. Among these issues are: the lack of agrarian reform as set forth in the Peace Agreements; the re-militarization and the mishandling of social conflicts via the application of laws such as the “Túmulos Law” that criminalize protesters; the structural discrimination of indigenous peoples; high levels of inequality and poverty; and the systematic violation of the right to prior consultation, to prior consultation, despite Guatemala’s obligation as a State Party to the ILO Convention 169.

OMCT denounced the arbitrary detention and the judicial harassment of Saúl Aurelio Méndez Muñoz and Antonio Rogelio Velásquez López in August 2013, two land rights defenders from the community of Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango, in Guatemala, who were arrested for advocacy against major hydroelectric dam and mining projects in their communities.

OMCT investigated this case during a fact-finding mission, resulting in a report and documentary film released in 2015. An Observatory delegation visited them in prison in February 2015, holding meetings with their lawyers and legal authorities in charge of the case. **As a result, after almost two and a half years in prison, both defenders were released on January 14, 2016, 78 days after having been declared innocent by a court.**



OMCT delegation visits incarcerated HRDs in Huehuetenango prison (February 2015)

© local partner ACOGUATE

Nigina, Tajikistan

Being a human rights defender in Tajikistan

For the United Nations International Day of Human Rights, OMCT ran a global digital campaign during the 10 days leading to 10 December. Dubbed [#10HRD10Dec](#), it profiled 10 anti-torture human rights defenders from Turkey, Benin, the Russian Federation, Bolivia, Libya, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Tajikistan, and how they contributed to society and human rights.

Nigina Bakhrieva's visceral sense of justice was passed on to by her parents, as she quickly demonstrated by following in the footsteps of her father – a prosecutor – in standing firmly for the rule of law.

“It's what I learned as I child,” she says. “When I witness human rights abuses, I cannot be indifferent; I take action.” And her career could not have been more ominous. Nigina started law school in Tajikistan, at the doorstep of Taliban-led Afghanistan, at the very outbreak of the bloody civil war that followed the country's independence, graduating five years later, in 1997, as the war ended, leaving behind a devastated country with some 100,000 people killed and 1.2 million displaced.

After teaching law at the Tajik state university, Nigina became a consultant providing capacity-building expertise for various organizations. Moving quickly into human rights, she went to work for the United Nations Tajikistan Office for Peace Building where she reviewed national legislation to make sure it conformed to international human rights standards.

Thus, while still a budding lawyer and founder of the Bureau on Human Rights and Rule of Law of Tajikistan, Nigina helped to litigate with success Tajikistan's first-ever human rights case before the United Nations Human Rights Committee (the equivalent of a human rights court) – something unheard of in Tajikistan until then. Her work for the abolition of the death penalty in her country led to a moratorium being adopted in 2004.

This fertile training ground provided a whole range of tools by which this ambitious lawyer was able to help her country – a former Soviet republic – advance towards the rule of law. In 2009, she created Nota Bene, which leads the Anti-Torture Coalition of 17 leading human rights organizations and activists in Tajikistan.

Go [here](#) for her full story, and the full [campaign](#).



Nigina Bakhrieva
© Peter Zangl

OUR 2015 OUTPUTS

In 2015, OMCT has strengthened its monitoring and support of individual HRDs at risk through:

Awareness raising & protection:

- 469 Urgent Interventions in 64 countries – high-visibility actions meant to grab the attention of key actors and urge them to act effectively to prevent threats, repression and violence against HRDs and their work.
- five international fact-finding and advocacy missions in 2015: Azerbaijan, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Mexico and Tajikistan.
- nine country reports – [Angola](#), [Azerbaijan](#) (two reports), [Bahrain](#), [Cameroon](#), [Guatemala](#), [Libya](#), and the [Philippines](#), and a briefing note on [Rwanda](#) (see “country reports”).
- one year-long campaign with the Human Rights & Democracy Network [HRDN](#): “[Stand 4 Human Rights Defenders](#)”, aimed at the European Union (EU).
- a 10-day-long digital campaign in the build up to [International Human Rights Day](#), on 10 December, promoting 10 anti-torture HRDs from 10 countries.
- 15 trial observation missions on four cases in Algeria, Azerbaijan and Bahrain.

Mobilizing intergovernmental organizations:

- High-level advocacy before the UN Human Rights Council (eight oral statements and nine side events organized or co-sponsored during the 28th, 29th and 30th regular sessions, one side event at the HRC Special Session on Burundi, and one joint side event at the UN Forum on Business and Human Rights); African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, [ACHPR](#) (two oral and written interventions submitted during the 56th and 57th sessions); [Council of Europe](#) (one side event on Azerbaijan at the Parliamentary Assembly); Organisation for Security in Europe, [OSCE](#) (one oral and one written intervention and one side event at the Human Dimension Implementing Meeting); Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, [IACHR](#) (submission of a report); European Union (two side events at the European Parliament, participation in the [EU NGO Forum](#) on shrinking space for civil society).

- Seven quasi-judicial complaints before universal and regional human rights mechanisms: three on Sudan and Angola before the ACHPR; one on Mexico to the UN Committee on Enforced Disappearances; four on cases of HRDs in Angola, the DRC, Egypt and Saudi Arabia to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; one on Syria to the UN Working Group on Enforced Disappearances; and one to the UN Human Rights Committee on Azerbaijan.
- “Inter-Mechanisms Meeting 5.2”: a gathering of all international and regional intergovernmental institutions equipped with mechanisms or tools dedicated to the protection of HRDs in order to exchange experiences and strengthen their protection mandate. Participants included mandate holders or their representatives from the UN, the ACHPR, the IACHR, the Council of Europe, the OSCE/ODIHR, the [International Organisation of La Francophonie](#), the European Union as well as international NGOs.

Direct material assistance and emergency support of two HRDs who were under imminent threats of attack:

- for the relocation of a Burundian HRD and his family,
- one to improve the security of the premises of a human rights organization in Pakistan promoting religious freedom and the rights of religious minorities.

Capacity building of human rights defenders:

In December 2015, OMCT organized an internal two-day brainstorming roundtable, “What can OMCT do to support its SOS-Torture network members and partners affected by funding restrictions? What counter strategies can be developed?” Attendants included 11 key members of OMCT’s SOS-Torture Network and partners from nine countries most affected by the phenomenon (Bangladesh, India, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Bolivia, Kenya, Israel) as well as the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Association and Assembly and OMCT representatives.

Country reports

[Azerbaijan: Repression escalates in run-up to European Games](#)
(April 2015)

[Azerbaijan: "If you can't beat them, jail them": The case of Human Rights Defender Rasul Jafarov](#) (June 2015)

[Imprisonment, torture and statelessness: The darkening reality of human rights defenders in Bahrain](#) (June 2015)

[Cameroon: Defenders of the Rights of LGBTI persons face homophobia and violence](#)
(February 2015)

["Smaller than David": the fight of human rights defenders in Guatemala](#) (February 2015)

["In Defense of Life": Civil Observation Mission Report on the situation of Human Rights Defenders in Mexico](#)
(September 2015), (OMCT contributed to our Mexican partner CMDPDH's report)

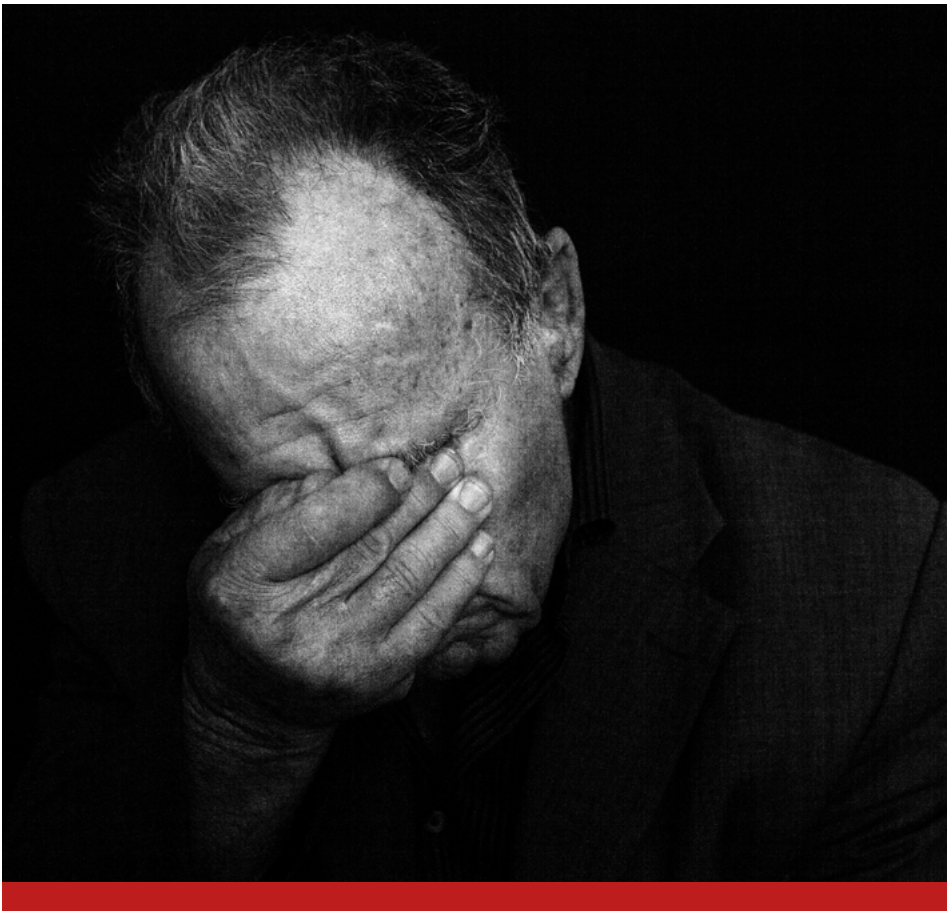
[The Philippines: human rights defenders at the forefront despite an ongoing culture of violence and impunity](#) (July 2015)

[Libya: Between a multifaceted conflict and the breakdown of the state: challenges to the defence of human rights](#) (April 2015)

[There are no more independent NGOs defending human rights in Rwanda](#) (April 2015)

[A Manual for and About Female Human Rights Defenders](#), by the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition with the contribution of OMCT (December 2015)

[Angola: "They want to keep us vulnerable": Human Rights Defenders Under Pressure](#)
(March 2015).



VICTIMS ASSISTANCE

THE SITUATION

Victims of torture continue to suffer for many years – if not forever – after the physical and psychological cruelty they experienced. Their worst scars are not even visible, and the problems that survivors face do not end when the torture stops. Once released, on top of their self-confidence and health, they often have to rebuild their lives somewhere else, having lost their reputation, jobs, property and social ties. Torture survivors have very few they can turn to. They cannot trust public bodies and are reluctant to speak out: having been discredited by local authorities and official media smear campaigns, they often fear reprisals and failing justice systems that risk re-victimizing them.

It is thus vital for them to gain access to legal, medical and social support to receive necessary protection, seek justice and slowly become able to rebuild their lives.

OMCT provides a unique safety net when other support is not accessible or available. It offers torture victims – often marginalized – our understanding and material support to cover their immediate recovery needs and rebuild their lives. Our fund allows victims of torture and their family members, or organizations on their behalf, anywhere in the world to receive financial support or direct assistance within days.

WHAT WE DO

The OMCT Victims Assistance fund is intended as a safety net when other support is unavailable. It is open to any human around the world who has suffered torture or ill-treatment, as ascertained by local partners of our trusted SOS-Torture Network.

Survivors of torture can submit, in a simple application, in person or through an organization, a request for assistance for legal, medical and social needs worth \$50 to \$5,000 and receive the assistance within days of their request, after verification of their case with a local organization. This assistance is targeted at helping them with their most immediate needs.

We leave it up to the torture victim to specify what they need the assistance for:

- healthcare costs to restore physical and psychological well being;
- emergency travel to a rehabilitation centre or relocation to safety in another country;
- legal fees and assistance to seek justice and reparation;
- basic living costs to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration;
- education or professional training or other social support to rebuild torture victims' lives.

OMCT monitors victims' progress through direct contact with them, their legal representatives and/or our SOS-Torture Network partners.



OUR 2015 IMPACTS

A safety net for torture victims worldwide

In 2015, OMCT assisted 155 victims from seven countries: Syria, Bolivia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Lebanon, Mexico, Pakistan, Togo and Turkey.

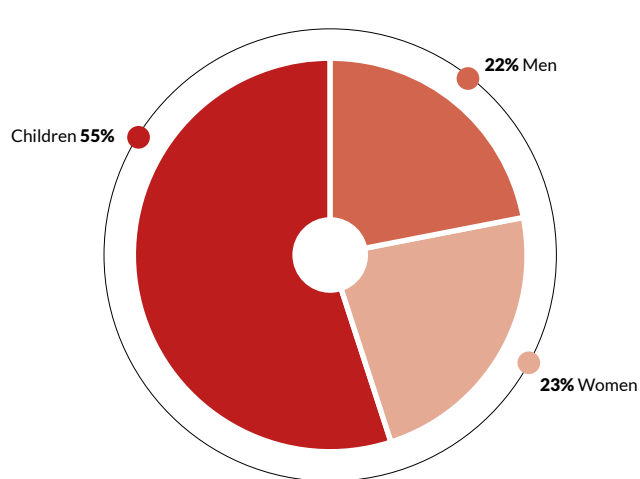
In April 2015, OMCT, through its Turkish member Sohram-Casra, provided medical assistance and rehabilitation to a 44-year-old asylum seeker, Ahmed*, who had fled his home country to Turkey after having been tortured by Syrian soldiers in Aleppo.

The worst effects of the repeated beatings with sticks and cables he underwent are not physical. Ahmed has regular nightmares about his ordeal. At times he has panic attacks and cannot trust anyone around him. He is also worried about his future.

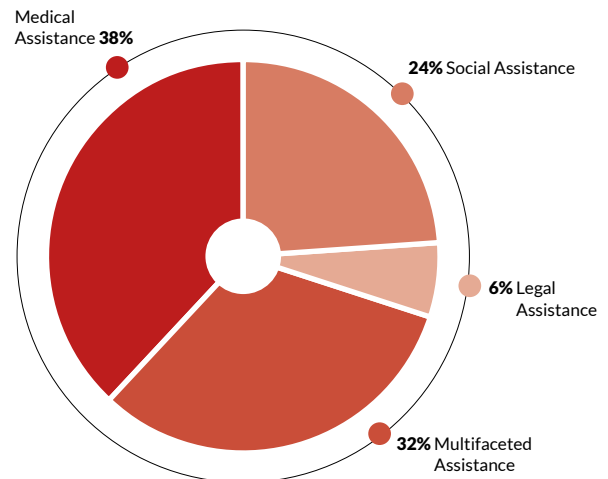
Surviving war in one's country, and having to reinvent a new life as an asylum seeker in a new country without being allowed to work legally is hard enough. A past haunting one's days and nights makes it harder yet.

OMCT's Victims Assistance Fund allowed Ahmed to receive psychological support over six months and to obtain the minimum necessary medication on his road to rehabilitation. Sohram-Casra has received an overwhelming number of help requests given the on-going violence in Syria and outpour of asylum-seekers into neighbouring Turkey.

*Name has been changed to protect the victim's identity.



Victims of torture assisted in 2015 by gender



Type of assistance provided

THE HUMAN STORY

Yavuz, Turkey

Step one of torture-victim recovery: Speaking with someone who understands.

It would take hundreds of pages to describe the brutal tortures he underwent, but Yavuz Binbay is proud to say he survived them. “Torture taught me that life is beautiful and that I must protect it,” he adds, an indelible smile on his face. “That good times come after bad times.”

Now all of Yavuz’s muscles hurt from the hours he was kept hung by the wrists, arms tied behind his back. Every one of his joints aches from hours surviving naked, buried in the snow, and years of sleeping on concrete cell floors. He was once beaten up so badly that he was shelved in a morgue. His many marks and scars still bear witness to the days he spent macerating in a septic tank, the many beatings and burns received, the times he almost died in a conveniently arranged car crash or fall down an elevator shaft.

An ethnic Kurd from an aristocratic Sufi family highly influential in Mesopotamia from the seventh century until 1914, Yavuz is invested with a sense of mission. Early on, he joined a non-violent organization demanding greater cultural and political rights for his people, spent some six years in jail during the military dictatorship that followed the 1980 coup d’état, plus another year under civil rule. They tried repeatedly to break him down in Turkey’s cruellest “torture laboratories”, the first time when he was only 12 years old.

After being severely wounded in a fourth attempted murder in 1994, Yavuz was welcomed to Geneva as a refugee. Yet, soon after recovering, he could not resist the urge to help fellow torture survivors whose needs he knows oh-so well. In 1997, he went back to Turkey and tried to set up an organization for torture victims, [Sohram-Casra](#), which soon became a SOS-Torture network member.

“The first thing I tell them is ‘It’s over now; you are safe,’” he says. “Torture victims need someone who respects them, who understands them. You must offer them empathic solidarity. Those tortured for political reasons also need to know that someone is doing something for their people.”
Read the full story [here](#).



Yavuz Binbay, founder of Sohram-Casra, is also a refugee in Switzerland and a torture victim himself

© Jonathan Granger

TORTURE

THE SITUATION

The UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment is the principal international treaty and blueprint for the eradication of torture, ratified by 159 out of 193 UN Member States.

The central role of civil society

The effectiveness of the review process to which States party to the Convention submit themselves depends fundamentally on the involvement of non-governmental organisations and coalitions against torture. Change stems from their ability to convey crucial information about torture practices and about needed legal and policy changes.

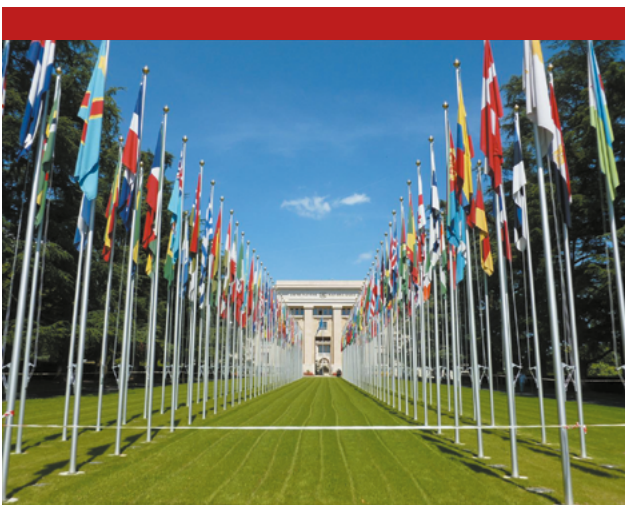
NGOs inform the Committee of the current challenges and successes in the application of the Convention in their country and of measures taken to implement the Committee's Concluding Observations.

WHAT WE DO

The Committee Against Torture (CAT) consists of UN experts who assess the effectiveness of the measures carried out by States parties to the Convention Against Torture. NGOs directly provide it with invaluable, country-specific information, offering an alternative perspective to the reports periodically submitted by States parties. NGOs can share this data through private briefings with the CAT that take place prior to the examination of the State party's report by the Committee.

As coordinator of civil-society presence at the CAT, OMCT:

- communicates ahead of time with national NGOs warning them that their countries will be reviewed in an upcoming session;
- builds the reporting capacity of NGOs on the Convention Against Torture through legal trainings in their home countries;
- provides administrative, logistical and financial support to NGOs to enable their programmed attendance of CAT sessions and private briefings;
- provides technical, information-gathering and editorial support to effective country reporting;
- moderates the NGO private briefing sessions reserved for NGOs to jointly bring their concerns to the Committee;
- recommends visibility opportunities for advocacy messaging during CAT sessions;
- supports local partners in the follow-up implementation of the recommendations in their countries.



OUR 2015 IMPACTS

Giving a voice to civil society and victims to achieve change

OMCT helped over 100 NGOs from 18 States under review to get their voice heard at the CAT. We coordinated with numerous civil-society contributors and supported the drafting of six so-called “Alternative Reports” on torture in their countries, which NGOs are entitled to submit before the CAT. We organized and moderated NGO briefings with the Committee experts to present the information contained in the reports and articulate their main messages on the situation in their country. We provided trainings and raised awareness about international mechanisms, encouraging NGOs to better use the Convention to combat torture and advance human rights in their countries.

As a result, the information provided by NGOs and the reforms they demanded have been systematically reflected in the Committee’s findings, providing an authoritative record of torture in their country. There was substantial media coverage on torture and the CAT in domestic media, and, with OMCT’s support, NGOs subsequently successfully engaged their countries on issues including prison and legal reforms and steps to counter impunity. Thanks to the work of OMCT and its members, Pakistan and Ivory Coast have also committed to engage with the CAT by sending in their long-overdue state reports. In 2015, Alternative Reports were submitted by NGOs for 17 out of the 18 countries under review.



NGO representatives José Domingo Dougan Beaca, OMCT Executive Council Vice-President, and André Kangni Afanou, CACIT Executive Director (Togo) at the CAT © Nicole Bürli

Protecting persons from being sent back to countries where they risk torture

States have an obligation under Article 3 of the Convention Against Torture not to send somebody to a country where he or she may face torture. But worries about national security threats and fears about increasing migration flows have led many states to try to lower the bar of protection or shirk their obligation. OMCT successfully advocated in 2015 for the Committee to set out a progressive set of legal safeguards and a protection frameworks against this violation. In August 2015, the CAT agreed – after OMCT organized an expert briefing and published two specialized policy papers – to draft a new General Comment on Article 3 of the Convention. General Comments are authoritative interpretations on the obligations under the Convention that provide States with valuable guidance as to how to apply and implement the Convention.

See OMCT's paper for the CAT on non-refoulement [here](#).

Securing a more effective follow-up to recommendations

Following up on the CAT's findings on the countries examined is key to rendering the CAT's recommendations effective.

As civil-society coordinator, OMCT organized in February an [Expert Forum with the Committee and civil-society](#)

[representatives](#) from Asia, Africa, Central Asia, Europe, and Latin America to discuss the Committee's working methods. The Forum focused in particular on ways to strengthen the Committee's own follow-up procedure as well as on civil-society strategies to hold states to account following their reviews. In September 2015 the CAT issued new [guidelines](#) with an improved framework for the Committee's own follow-up on the recommendations it issues.

Naming and shaming – when the world is watching – pays off

OMCT had brought before the CAT the case of prominent Azerbaijani human rights defender Leyla Yunus, held in detention since July 2014 on false charges of “treason”, “fraud”, “tax evasion” and other charges that were clearly aimed at halting her critical human-rights work. On 12 November 2015, her husband Arif Yunusov was conditionally released –the very day that the CAT began its review of Azerbaijan. Was this a coincidence? Leyla Yunus was subsequently released on 9 December 2015 –the very day that the CAT published its Concluding Observations following its review of Azerbaijan. No coincidence.



February Expert Forum in Geneva led by OMCT
© OMCT

THE HUMAN STORY

Leyla and Arif, Azerbaijan

How advocacy paid off for Leyla in Azerbaijan

Throughout 2015, OMCT worked intensively to protect HRDs in Azerbaijan. With the June 2015 Baku European Games – and the associated greater international media presence – approaching, the Government sharply stepped up its repression through the arbitrary arrest of almost all prominent HRDs and independent journalists for fear these might use the event as a platform to denounce the human rights situation in the country.

OMCT launched numerous urgent alerts, undertook a fact-finding mission to the country, produced two mission reports on the situation of HRDs, and monitored the trials of long-time human rights defenders Leyla and Arif Yunus, and Rasul Jafarov. It also participated in an informal working group of NGOs at the European level as well as in a global campaign called “Sport4Rights”; co-organized a peaceful demonstration in Luxembourg Square in Brussels and a hearing in the European Parliament; and held closed meetings with European Diplomats.



After a year of intense advocacy, Leyla Yunus, Head of the Institute for Peace and Democracy and OMCT General Assembly member, and Arif Yunusov, her husband, were both released from prison at the end of 2015 after almost two years in jail and house arrest.

They were allowed to travel out of their country in April 2016 to receive urgent surgery and medical treatment for severe chronic conditions. Both had been sentenced to more than seven years of imprisonment, following procedures that grossly disregarded international standards of fair trial and due process.

Ramiro L., Orlando, Ramiro R. and Rodrigo, Mexico

Securing landmark decisions and redress for victims

In 2009, four civilian men – Ramiro L., Orlando, Ramiro R. and Rodrigo - were detained in Mexico without an arrest warrant as the main suspects in a kidnapping (the ‘cuatro civiles’ case). They were arrested without charge, tortured, then detained in a military prison where they were tortured regularly for six years.

In August 2015, three years after OMCT and its Mexican Network Member, the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH), had submitted a case before the Committee Against Torture (CAT), the Committee rendered a landmark decision concluding that Mexico was accountable for the acts of torture inflicted upon the four detainees. It was the first case against Mexico ever submitted before the CAT in which the victims were recognized and granted extensive reparation. The UN’s primary anti-torture body confirmed that what these four men had suffered was indeed torture.



Scene from an arrest by militarized police in Culiacán, Sinaloa, Mexico.
© Contraluz/Juan Carlos Cruz

Reminding Mexico, a State party to the Convention Against Torture, of its commitment to combat such practices, the CAT urged Mexico to bring its application of the law in line with international standards and make significant institutional and legislative changes. The case also drew attention to the lack of independence and effectiveness in the judiciary and investigative authorities, including the National Human Rights Institution, and to the military’s excessive powers. After this, a Mexican Court followed the CAT’s recommendations and acquitted the complainants, acknowledging that they had been tortured. **They walked free on 11 December 2015.**



Scene from an arrest by militarized police, Mexico.
© Contraluz/Juan Carlos Cruz

OUR 2015 OUTPUTS

- [Expert Forum](#) on the Follow-Up Procedure to the Committee Against Torture's Concluding Observations in Geneva, February 2015.
- One sub-regional civil-society consultation organized in Tunisia in March 2015, including participants from Morocco, Mauretania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Lebanon, on maximising impact from civil society interaction with the CAT.

Venezuela

Follow-up mission in October 2015, which included a strategy meeting to increase knowledge and awareness of CAT follow-up procedure among NGO representatives, and meetings with high-ranking Government officials. It is noteworthy that OMCT and the Carter Center were the only two international human rights non-governmental organizations that held significant meetings with Venezuelan Government agencies in 2015 (see the [Report of the Mission](#)).

Kazakhstan

High-level Mission with former Special Rapporteur on Torture Manfred Nowak, Brigitte Dufour of the International Partnership for Human Rights (IPHR), Yevgeniy Zhovtis of the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (KIBHR), October 2015 (see the [joint Press Release](#), and [Follow-up to CAT observations here](#)).

Colombia

- Follow-up mission on the implementation of CAT recommendations, November 2015, jointly organized with the [Colombian Coalition Against Torture \(CCCT\)](#), and headed by Roberto Garretón, Chilean human rights defender (see [Preliminary Conclusions of the Mission](#)).
- Coordination of an advocacy mission of Colombian human rights defenders during review of Colombia by the CAT to present the joint alternative report to European institutions: advocacy meetings held with the European External Action Service (EEAS) as well as with the Embassies of the Netherlands, Germany, Finland and Denmark. A video with the key messages to the European States was recorded as part of the mission (see the [video](#)).

Pakistan

High-level Mission in August 2015 with former member of the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, Cees Flinterman, jointly organized with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, advocating for the enactment of an anti-torture law and the submission of Pakistan's state report to the CAT.

Bangladesh

High-level mission in August 2015 with the participation of OMCT's Secretary General jointly organized with [Odhikar](#), engaging civil society, state institutions and National Human Rights Institutions on the country's long-overdue report to the Committee. The mission addressed the protection of anti-torture defenders and their ability to access funding, and achieved a halt to government plans to lower protections through the country's new anti-torture law.

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

OMCT conducted two high-level fact finding missions jointly with [Agir Ensemble](#) on the compliance with CAT in the country's prison system in Kivu. During the missions we inspected a series of places of detention in both parts of the province, under the leadership of OMCT Executive Council member Aminata Dieye from Senegal and former OMCT Secretary General Eric Sottas from Switzerland. The [report](#) was presented in June 2015 before the UN Human Rights Council. During the mission a number of prisoners found to be detained without any legal basis were released on the spot upon request of OMCT.

Mexico

Together with its member, the Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CMDPDH) OMCT submitted an [analytical study](#) of the compliance of domestic legislation with anti-torture standards in Mexico, published in September 2015. The paper sets out a set of norms and principles that Mexico's future Anti-Torture Law should incorporate. On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, OMCT co-organized and participated in the Forum «Torture and Impunity in Mexico: elements for an effective anti-torture law», held on June 25 and 26, at the Autonomous University of Tlaxcala (UATx), along with CMDPDH, the Instituto para la Seguridad

y Democracia (INSYDE), the Centre for the Development of International Justice and the Ibero-American University. OMCT also pursued a strategic litigation case at the CAT, resulting in the first ever ruling rendered on Mexico in September 2015.

Togo and Ivory Coast

With its member organizations [CACIT](#) (Togo) and [MIDH](#) (Ivory Coast), OMCT continued to advocate the implementation of the UN Convention through missions, trainings of lawyers and public awareness campaigns. Legislation criminalizing torture and providing increased safeguards for those detained are presently under consideration. OMCT and its members are conducting authoritative research on the structural reasons for impunity in both countries. OMCT also obtained confirmation of Ivory's Coast commitment to submit its 20-years-overdue report to the CAT.

Uruguay

A high-level advocacy mission in follow-up to the CAT recommendations was conducted in 2015, including high-level government meetings and the inspection of prisons including those holding juvenile prisoners. OMCT received commitments by the authorities to overhaul the country's juvenile justice system in line with the CAT recommendations and to tackle impunity for penitentiary staff accused of violent abuse.

Our 2015 joint alternative reports for the CAT's 54–56th Sessions

- on Colombia ([Spanish](#), [English](#))
- on the Republic of [Macedonia](#)
- on Azerbaijan (*see the [Report](#)*)
- on [Switzerland](#), August 2015
- Contribution to the List Of Issues Prior to Reporting of [Guatemala](#)
- on Tunisia : Contribution to the List Of Issues Prior to Reporting (not public)

Other submissions:

- [DRC](#) - Report on the prisons in Kivu
- [Analytical study for a general law on torture in Mexico](#)

Sharing information on the CAT among NGOs

The CAT Blog

Entitled « Nothing can Justify Torture, engaging with the Committee Against Torture », the [CAT Blog](#) was launched on 3 November 2014, to mark the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Convention Against Torture.

Its objective is to provide greater awareness the CAT's work and of the Convention, to increase mobilization of civil society organizations around the CAT, as well as to use the CAT procedures to foster the implementation of the Convention.

OMCT invites and encourages anyone working on the Convention and with its monitoring Committee, including Committee members, representatives from NGOs, academics and journalists, to participate in this exchange of experience by submitting an article for OMCT's blog. Please contact us for more information.

Our 2015 blog posts were:

- [Venezuelan](#) CSOs present the Joint Alternative Report in January 2015 before the Committee Against Torture Review of Venezuela.
- [Violence against Women](#) by private actors: Is there State responsibility under the Convention against Torture? by Felice Gaer, Vice chair, of the Committee against Torture.
- Thanks to the Committee against Torture, Rasim Bayramov from [Kazakhstan](#) was awarded compensation for torture.
- Urgent need to prevent [transfers](#) to torture.
- Involuntary sterilization: A means of torture against Roma women in [Slovakia](#).

The e-bulletin

OMCT's [e-bulletin](#) was created to relay to NGOs the main points covered during CAT country reviews and the Concluding Observations so as to foster a better understanding by civil society actors of the Convention and participation in the Committee.



TORTURE PREVENTION IN TUNISIA

THE SITUATION

In 2011, just after the fall of President Ben Ali after 23 years in power and at the beginning of the Arab uprising, OMCT opened its first field office in Tunisia. Within two years, OMCT Tunisia had set up two counselling centres (SANAD, which means “support” in Arabic) in Sidi Bouzid and Kef, in the centre and Northwest of the country, respectively. The SANAD centres offer legal aid as well as social, psychological and medical assistance to victims of torture and ill treatment and to their families.

In 2015, Tunisia was the target of three major terrorist attacks in March, June, and November, which led the Government to take drastic anti-terrorism measures that challenge the legislative advancements enshrined in the country’s new 2014 Constitution. Yet, the fight against terrorism must adhere to the principles of the rule of law and respect fundamental rights.

Violations by security forces now occur not only during the arrests of terrorism suspects, but also of those in conflict with the law – whether petty criminals, drug users, or LGBTI individuals. Incidentally, the criminalization of homosexuals, which has increased with their greater outspokenness today, has made torture and ill treatment of this group more visible. Tunisia therefore is in the middle of a precarious transition period, the volatility of which has only been compounded by threats to national security and a dire socio-economic context. This has called for our repositioning and the reformulation of OMCT’s main advocacy messages to the authorities. Based in Tunis, Kef and Sidi Bouzid, OMCT Tunisia’s 16-member team of lawyers, social workers, psychologists and communication specialists, works in concert with other anti-torture NGOs to collaborate as much as possible with national authorities to combat torture, prevent excessive police violence and bring an end to impunity.



International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, June 2015 slogan

WHAT WE DO

The objective of OMCT in Tunisia is to participate and use the momentum of the transition to democracy to advance the country on reforms for the effective prevention of torture and for accountability. We directly assist torture victims in Tunisia, and strengthen the capacity of local anti-torture initiatives when they are already underway, or aim to address gaps related to torture where initiatives have not yet taken root.



March to a former prison 9-April in Tunis, June 2015
© Augustin Le Gall



OMCT direct assistance programme SANAD report, October 2015 (see [link](#) for more information).



"All the good words in Arabic": Graffiti on the wall of CineVog Kram in Tunis, December 2014
© Gabriele Reiter

OUR 2015 IMPACTS

Aiding transitional justice

Transitioning to democracy is a process that cannot take place without the redress and reparation of victims. OMCT has developed a partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs to provide capacity building to public servants of regional offices around the country to better inform Tunisian citizens on how to file cases with the Truth and Dignity Commission (IVD). This institution was created to register and investigate complaints of human rights violations committed before 2013, including under Presidents Ben Ali and Habib Bourguiba.

Informing the UN Human Rights Council about Tunisia

Another of our objectives is to get the word out – beyond Tunisia and to the world – about the challenges and successes on the road to democracy. We thus organized a Side-event at the Human Rights Council with UN Special Rapporteur on Torture Juan Mendez and our partner ACAT: "Tunisia: The fight against impunity – a key for the prevention of torture".

Victim rehabilitation through self-support groups

Cooperation with the Tunisian Ministry of Social Affairs to empower psychologists (from public services) and SANAD staff to moderate community-based self-support groups for direct and indirect victims of torture and ill treatment, based on the experience of the British NGO "Room to Heal".

Bringing award-winning films to prisons

While prisoners are in jail they do not have to be hermetically isolated from society. To improve their detention conditions and social reintegration after their release, we developed a partnership with Tunisia's renowned film festival, the Journées Cinématographiques de Carthage (JCC), to take film screenings into four Tunisian prisons, allowing detainees to exchange with film makers and actors of films featured in the competition.

Improving detention conditions

In January 2015 OMCT released a report on the implementation of claims and complaints procedures that should facilitate Tunisian prisoners' communication about their conditions of detention.

THE HUMAN STORY

Karim, Tunisia

Helping survivors of torture rebuild their lives

Karim* is from Sidi Bouzid. He grew up under the Ben Ali dictatorship in a poor family, in a poor neighbourhood. His parents divorced early, and his siblings had disabilities, meaning he quickly had to quit school to earn a living. But the 200 dinars a month he made as a security guard did not allow him to support his family so he eventually turned to theft. Arrested in 2013 for burglary and assault, he was tortured under interrogation by the National Guard, who beat him to extract a confession. Once in the Sidi Bouzid Civilian prison, he was severely beaten again by prison guards. As a result of the beatings, which included truncheon blows and kicks to the head, he lost his eyesight. His family, which was already struggling at home to survive, went to its friends and neighbours to collect money, which it handed to the people Karim had robbed, asking them to drop the case and allow his release.

He was released after nine months in prison and has since been in the hands of OMCT's SANAD Counselling Centre for Victims of Torture. Although doctors warned that he had little chance of recovering his eyesight, with OMCT encouragement and assistance from SANAD he underwent five surgical operations on his eyes and recovered partial sight (4/10) in one eye. He also received psychological counselling. Though he is still unemployed, he feels much better and has frequently told our SANAD staff, **"You saved my life, or rather, you have given it back to me. Thank you!"**

*The victim's name has been changed to protect their identity.



OUR 2015 OUTPUTS

After the terrorist attack in Sousse last June that killed 38 tourists on a beach, authorities beefed up their powers by adopting an anti-terrorism law that goes as far as allowing the sanction of “terror” offences with the death penalty, and giving police authorities the ability to detain terror suspects for up to 15 days without access to a lawyer.

In July 2015 OMCT Tunisia, in concert with NGO partners, sent a [letter](#) to the Tunisian Parliament asking it to amend the bill, generating significant media and public attention. Though international media largely supported our critique, some national media in Tunisia reacted strongly against it, in line with the Tunisian public’s overall tolerance for use of torture when it comes to interrogating terror suspects. To try to address public opinion, OMCT in conjunction with its partner organizations developed a campaign called “[No to terrorism, yes to human rights](#)”, successfully launched in early 2016.

Building a strong national body to prevent torture

After lobbying over the past four years for the creation in Tunisia of a national authority for the prevention of torture, the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), OMCT provided technical assistance to the Tunisian Parliament in the pre-selection of candidates for membership of the NPM – the first such institution in the Arab world. The members’ election took place in March 2016. OMCT will now continue advocacy to ensure that the NPM is able to carry out its mandate effectively and independently.

Increasing direct assistance in the face of continued impunity

OMCT’s direct assistance programme SANAD has increased its capacity and ability to assist victims of torture and ill treatment in Tunisia. The SANAD centres assisted a total of 137 beneficiaries by December 2015, the vast majority of whom were not suspected terrorists, which shows that torture is not a punctual side-effect of the current security threats, but more deeply ingrained. In a press conference in November 2015, in the presence of OMCT’s Vice President Dick Marty and Tunisian Executive Council Member Mokhtar Trifi, respectively, OMCT denounced the persistence of impunity in cases of torture and ill treatment as well as the increasingly alarming trends of intimidation and harassment of victims and their families.

Youth outreach

A cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Culture has enabled “[Sous le Jasmin](#)”, an exhibit on Tunisian torture victims by photographer Augustin Le Gall developed in conjunction with OMCT, to travel across the country’s cultural centres since 2013 in conjunction with debates, film screenings and theatre plays.

In 2015, OMCT extended its outreach by organizing debates around the exhibit in new settings including universities, where some 200 students participated. Their interest in current human rights issues, transitional justice and Tunisia’s heritage was impressive and has inspired OMCT to further boost its youth-engagement efforts in the country.



The photo exhibition “Sous le Jasmin” at the international human rights film festival in Geneva, March 2015 © Emteyz Bellali



Workshop on transitional justice for members of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Hammamet, June 2015 © Gabriele Reiter



Workshop on victim assistance for health professionals and cooperation with SANAD in Tunis, November 2015 © Gabriele Reiter

OUR DONORS

Foundations

Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme
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Bread for the World
Fondation de bienfaisance du Groupe Pictet
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Anonymous Foundations

Governments

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International and Inter-governmental Organisations

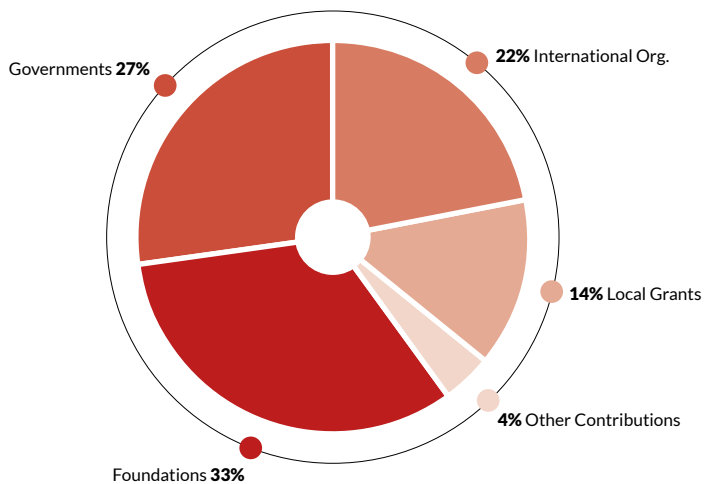
European Commission
UN Special Fund of the OPCAT
United Nations Development Programme

Local Grants (Cantons and Communes in Switzerland)

République et canton de Genève
Canton de Bâle-Ville
Ville de Genève
Ville de Lausanne
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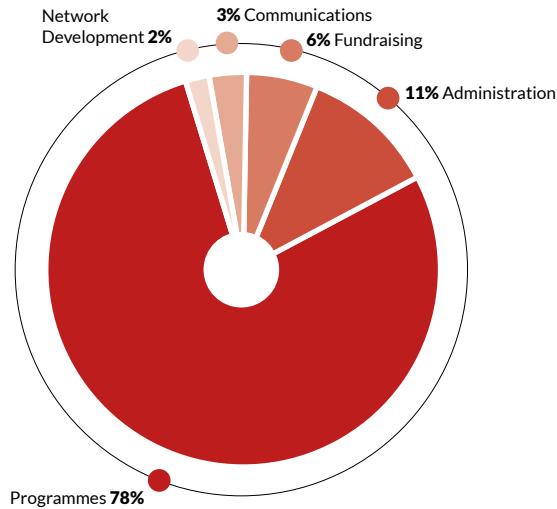
Other Contributions

Private Contributions



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW 2015

Breakdown of expenditure by category



Balance sheet from 1 January to 31 December 2015 (CHF)

INCOME		2'028'694.77
Urgent Assistance to Victims of Torture	70'868.28	
Children's Rights	172'886.94	
Violence against Women	79'322.78	
Human Rights Defenders - Observatory	232'438.47	
Committee against Torture	388'208.02	
OMCT Tunisia	472'913.13	
TOTAL PROGRAMMES	1'416'637.62	
Federal, Cantonal, Communal Grants	118'600.00	
Grants from European Governments	15'000.00	
Grants from Foundations and Others	404'199.49	
Private Donations	74'257.66	
TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL	612'057.15	
EXPENSES		2'016'639.19
Urgent Assistance to Victims of Torture	80'544.39	
Children's Rights	177'548.02	
Violence against Women	86'044.56	
Human Rights Defenders - Observatory	299'748.85	
Committee against Torture	443'735.69	
OMCT Tunisia	472'913.13	
TOTAL PROGRAMME EXPENSES	1'560'534.64	
Training	1'895.82	
Fundraising	115'468.82	
Communication	67'873.51	
Development of the Network	48'711.79	
Administration	222'154.61	
TOTAL INSTITUTIONAL EXPENSES	456'104.55	
BALANCE PRIOR TO INTERESTS AND OTHER INCOMES		12'055.58
INTERESTS AND OTHER INCOMES		16'275.16
Creditors Interests	0.10	
Other Incomes	16'275.06	
EXCESS OF INCOMES		28'330.74

GOVERNANCE

Executive Council

President:

BERTHELOT Yves / France

Vice-Presidents:

DOUGAN BEACA José / Equatorial Guinea

MARTY Dick / Switzerland

Treasurer:

TRAVIS Anthony / United Kingdom

Members:

CANTON Santiago Alejandro / Argentina

DIEYE Aminata / Senegal

QUIROGA CARRILLO Jahel / Colombia

SADOVSKAYA Olga / Federation of Russia

TIPHAGNE Henri / India

TRIFI Mokhtar / Tunisia

Special Advisers:

BABEL-GUERIN Eliane / Switzerland

BRUSTLEIN-BOBST Dominique / Switzerland

SAYEGH Christine / Switzerland

General Assembly

Middle East and North Africa

ABU AL-ZULOF George / Palestine

ASSAF Georges / Lebanon

BENABDESSELAM Abdel-ilah / Morocco

DUTOUR Nassera / Algeria

GHAEMI Hadi / Iran

SABER Karim / Egypt

TRIFI Mokhtar / Tunisia

Europe

BERTHELOT Yves / France

BODNAR Adam / Poland

DIMITRAS Panayote / Greece

DOEK E. Jaap / Netherlands

MARTY Dick / Switzerland

SADOVSKAYA Olga / Federation of Russia

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CHUKWUMA Innocent / Nigeria

DIALLO Oumar / Senegal

DIEYE Aminata / Senegal

DOUGAN BEACA José / Equatorial Guinea

MASIKA BIHAMBA Justine / DRC Congo

MESSAOUD Boubacar / Mauritania

MOHOCHI Sam / Kenya

Asia

De MESA Teodoro / Philippines

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Human Rights Defenders

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RABHI Housseem, Legal coordinator

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OMCT would like to thank all our interns and fellows for generously contributing their time, energy, creativity and good spirits in 2015:

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